

## VOLUME 21, NO. 3 Fall 2003

### Gating Idaho's Risky Mines

The Idaho Panhandle National Forest, with assistance from Bat Conservation International and others, has been installing bat-friendly gates on scores of hazardous, abandoned mines scattered across the region. The long-running effort was recently featured on National Public Radio's All Things Considered program.



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The area contains an estimated 1,000 old mines, ranging in size from short, simple shafts to miles of underground passageways, and some of them have proven a dangerous attraction for visitors, says U.S. Forest Service geologist Jeff Johnson. An order forbidding access to the mines without a formal permit had limited effect, he said.

The Panhandle National Forest instituted a program several years ago to remove access to the abandoned mines, focusing first on those that are most dangerous or accessible. This past summer, BCI's Faith Watkins helped University of New Mexico researcher Rick Sherwin survey many of the mines for current or potential use by bats to determine which should be gated rather than back-filled.

At least 380 of the mines were potentially accessible to the public, and about 145 have been closed – 83 of them with gates that keep people out while giving unimpeded access to bats. The special focus is on protecting Townsend's big-eared *bats* (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), although at least seven other species use Idaho mines and will also benefit.

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